RESOLUTE - CORNWALLIS ISLAND

Pam: 711.42(2) [Resolute Bay] RB

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POLARPAM

RESOLUTE - CORNWALLIS ISLAND

Cornwallis Island was discovered in 1819 by Parry on his first voyage in search of a northwest passage and named after Admiral the Honourable Sir William Cornwallis. Its insularity was proved by Franklin, who sailed around it in 1845 before heading southward to disappear forever.

Resolute Bay was named for H.M.S. "Resolute" (410 tons), one of the vessels of the Austin expedition in search of Franklin which spent the winter of 1850-51 at Griffiths Island, southwest of Resolute Bay. The bay to the east was called Assistance after the sister ship of the "Resolute". The "Resolute" had an interesting subsequent history. She was in the same area under Belcher in the years 1852-4 and was abandoned by Belcher's order in the summer of 1854 along with three other sound ships. The "Resolute" drifted out into Davis Strait and was picked up by the U.S. whaler "George Henry" near Cape Mercy, Baffin Island, in September 1855. The Americans repaired the vessel and graciously returned her to Britain.

In 1947 the U.S. icebreaker "Edisto" escorted a cargo ship, the "Wyandot", to establish a joint U.S.-Canadian weather station at Winter Harbour on Melville Island. Heavy ice made it impossible to reach Melville Island and Resolute Bay was

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selected as an alternative site. The name of the weather station has been officially shortened to Resolute.

The R.C.A.F. established a base at Resolute in 1949. This station is now one of the more important in the north, with an airstrip suitable for year-round operation and comfortable living quarters. There are scheduled North Star flights from Dorval via Fort Churchill. Resolute is an alternate for the U.S. base at Thule. The joint weather stations at Mould Bay, Prince Patrick Island, and at Isachsen, Ellef Ringnes Island, are serviced by R.C.A.F. airlift from Resolute. Supplies for Resolute and for the stations serviced by air from Resolute were for some years taken in by the U.S. Navy, but the Department of Transport took over this task in 1954.

The weather station was at first two miles from the airstrip on the west shore of Resolute Bay but has now been moved to the R.C.A.F. station. Surface weather and upper air observations are taken and a 24-hour watch maintained on WT. Weather observations are passed to Edmonton at regular intervals. A weather forecaster is stationed at Resolute. The weather and ionospheric stations have played host to a number of visiting scientific parties including geologists, geographers, and a drilling crew who drilled deep holes for a study of earth temperatures.

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The ionospheric station at the old weather station site on the west shore of Resolute Bay is a D.O.T. installation which maintains a separate mess. Ionospheric and magnetic observations are recorded and transmitted on a 24-hour basis. There is a seismograph operated by one technician who interprets the data daily and transmits it to the Dominion Observatory.

Though Cornwallis Island was undoubtedly inhabited in the past, no Eskimos had lived there for many generations. In the summer of 1953 four families, three from Port Harrison, P.Q., and one from Pond Inlet in Baffin Island, were voluntarily moved to Resolute Bay by the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources to see whether they could make a living better there than in the south where the game resources were insufficient for the population. The project is entirely self-contained and the group obtains its supplies from a small store operated by one of the Eskimos with the aid of a government loan. The R.C.M.P. detachment supervises the project, which is proving very successful. The Eskimos have been able to obtain all the country food they need, and sufficient fur to purchase their other requirements. They have also been employed from time to time for moving supplies during the airlifts and at ship-time, and for assisting scientific parties. They were sufficiently contented with conditions

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to request that some of their relatives join them. In the summer of 1955 six more families were moved to Resolute Bay including Idlouk, the central figure in the film "Land of the Long Day", and his family from Pond Inlet. The total Eskimo population is now 54 and it seems probable that other permanent colonies will be established gradually in the Queen Elizabeth Islands.

There are four old Eskimo village sites in the vicinity of Resolute Bay as well as numerous tent rings, stone-floored temporary house sites, stone caches and fox traps, indicating that some hundreds of years ago there must have been a considerable population. The site nearest to the airfield is about a quarter of a mile from the old weather station and half a mile from the shore. Archaeological investigations were begun in 1949 by a joint party from the Smithsonian Institution and the National Museum of Canada and have continued during several seasons. The upper layers yielded specimens from the whale-hunting Thule culture, which spread over the greater part of the Canadian Arctic from Alaska within the past thousand years. Arrow heads, fish lures, harpoon heads, spears, knife handles, pendants, pottery, and ivory combs were among the objects found, many of which showed very strong Alaskan affinities. One extremely

interesting find was a piece of a whale bone snow-knife handle with an incised pictograph, typically Alaskan in concept and execution, of five men harpooning a whale from a skin boat. Animal bones showed that seals were the principal food, with bowhead whale and walrus next in importance. There were many polar bear, fox, and dog bones but few remains of caribou or musk-ox. Underlying the Thule layers were a number of objects from the Dorset culture. This has been found throughout the Eastern Arctic and is probably a thousand or more years old. From these excavations it has been concluded that there have been at least three stages of occupation at Resolute Bay. The Dorset was the first, followed by an early phase of the Thule culture. These were probably both short periods of occupation possibly by only a few families. The last stage, a developed Thule culture, was of longer duration with a considerably larger population.

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